MAMMOTH CAVE

LETCHER

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WONDERFUL DISCOVERY!

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF A RECENT EXPLORATION OF THE CELEBRATED

MAMMOTH CAVE,

IN EDMONSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY,

BY DR. ROWAN, PROFESSOR SIMMONS AND OTHERS, OF LOUISVILLE, TO ITS TERMINATION IN AN

INHABITED REGION,

IN THE

INTERIOR OF THE EARTH!

CONTAINED IN A LETTER FROM

MONTGOMERY E. LETCHER, ESQ.

ONE OF THE EXPLORING PARTY, TO A PROFESSOR IN ONE OF THE

EASTERN COLLEGES.

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Wonderful Discovery, &c.

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY,
January 10, 1839.

DEAR SIR—

You will recollect when in August last, we explored together the "MAMMOTH CAVE," a greater distance than had before been performed, I told you my determination, at some future day, of finding the outlet or end of that extraordinary Cavern. I have done so; and while I write, the thought of the important discovery I have been instrumental in first placing before the inhabitants of the *outer* world, fills me with the most intense and overwhelming reflections to the extent that I at times doubt whether I am not under the influence of an exciting dream instead of the reality of truth, clear as the noon-day sun.

You will well remember when we were seated in the "Grand Vestibule" of the Cave, refreshing ourselves, (after our curious research) over "Kentucky hoe-cake and bacon," and a glass of pure south-side Madeira, we drank in ludicrous style, with three times three, "success to Symmes' Hole, and the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky," even our sable conductor, the grinning Pompey, joined in the chorus, and the "vasty" cavern, with its hundred lybrinths, echoed and re-echoed the sound, as if pleased at our disturbance of the solitude which dwelt within its bosom. Little did we either of us think, my friend, that our jest was to be reality,—that this cave, leading to unknown regions, was to terminate, after ramifications hundreds of miles in extent, in a new country inhabited by human beings, advanced in civilization, and marking a new era in the progressive discoveries of man!! Such, however, is the fact; the theory of JOHN CLEVES SYMMES is now proved to be true; the earth is hollow and inhabited, and the world must now rank him with Columbus and Galileo.

Being in Louisville soon after you left, I mentioned to Dr. Rowan of that city, my intention of making a thorough exploration of the cave and finding its termination; he expressed himself delighted with the plan, and proposed accom-

panying me, whenever I undertook it, together with his friend Professor Simmons. We agreed to keep our proceedings secret, and fixed upon the first Monday in November, as the day of meeting at my house, to make the arrangements. Accordingly on that day they both arrived, and after consultation, we concluded to meet again on the succeeding Saturday week, and proceed to the cave, well furnished with provisions and necessaries for, at least, a two weeks's journey. In the meantime, I made all the arrangements; got together our "necessaries," that is, the bacon, dried venison, biscuit, a *little* peach brandy, and all the et-ceteras; together with eight able bodied negroes, from my plantation, to carry these appendages, so useful and necessary, to say nothing of our own knapsacks, torches, instruments, &c. On Saturday the 17th November, we met at the tavern near the cave, and proceeded at once to the entrance. Our party consisted of eleven, all told, viz: Dr. Rowan, Professor Simmons, myself, and the eight negroes. Of provisions we had a sufficiency for about two weeks, our water however, (forty-five gallons) calculating at a small allowance each, was only a ten day's supply; but of this I felt no fear, as I knew there must exist springs somewhere in the cavern. When we arrived at the cave, and surveyed the gloomy entrance, now seen for the first time by Professor Simmons, our undertaking did not seem a pleasant one; even the negroes, in their talk, "no like de debbil's hole," and evinced great fear at the idea of being pent up in the bowels of the earth for a number of days. We pushed on with determination, having lighted our torches only to be extinguished at the "narrows," and at length we stood where daylight had probably not appeared since creation, and our "our voyage of discovery," was now fairly commenced.—It had been arranged that I should act as Secretary of the Expedition, and keep a daily Journal of the events. The rest of my communication will be a copy of the journal in its rough state, for which you must make all allowance.

JOURNAL, &c.

Saturday, Nov. 17, 1838. This day, at 10 o'clock, A. M. entered the Mammoth Cave in Edmonson County Ky., (for the purpose of exploring it to its extremity,) Dr. Rowan, and Professor Simmons, of Louisville, and Montgomery E. Letcher (myself), accompanied by eight negroes, provisioned for two weeks. This cave has been explored about 5 miles,

it was many years ago used by a company for the manufacture of saltpetre. Half past 10, A. M., entered the cave; bade adieu to daylight with a toast of "success to our *under*-taking," in about ten minutes, passed the "narrows," (a portion of the cave, about seven feet wide, through which the wind rushed terribly,) entered the "Grand Vestibule;" relighted our torches, and examined the splendid hall. Our torches scarcely allowed us sufficient light to penetrate the "dark profound," at least one hundred feet above us was the ceiling, as flat, smooth and unbroken, as if laid on with a trowel, the scene was gloomy, yet grand. After about half an hour spent in examining this noble hall, we passed thro' the "Grand Gallery," leaving the "Great Bat Room," on the right, and so through to the "Haunted Chambers," passed through the "Gap," and reached the fartherest known length of the cave explored at 2, P. M. This was a small chamber, nearly circular; the floor covered with fragments of lime stone, and the roof covered with bats, who amazed at our entrance, made fight with the torches and rattled about our heads terribly. It was really ludicrous to witness the contortions of the negroes, and hear their exclamations, at length they all fell flat on their faces, out went our lights, and our laughter was turned to anger, while their stifled screams of "de debbil," formed a *euphonious* compound, which taken in connection with the darkness around might well put one in mind of the infernal regions. Peace was at length restored, a light was struck, and hastily collecting together a heap of the half burnt canes* lying around, a fire was speedily kindled, that relieved us from further trouble respecting the bat-tribe. We sat round the fire, while Jim, (one of the negroes,) broiled some of the dried venison, and a hearty meal was our first one partaken in the "Mammoth Cave." Two passages now presented themselves, and we were in doubt which to follow, till we thought of the expediency of firing a gun at each entrance, and the one which reverbrated the most was to be our choice. The effect was splendid, from one proceeded echo after echo, melting away, until lost in the distance it seemed a mere whisper. The other was louder but ended suddenly, as if its progress was barred by a solid wall. By compass, the passage chosen led due east, and we now commenced our journey, the descent

* This portion of the cave is full of half burnt cane, probably used by the Aborigines in their explorations to this distance.

was slight but perceptible, a fine hard earthen bottom, for the first mile we penetrated, save here and there a few scattered lime stones, that in the course of time had fallen from the roof, the heighth of the passage averaged about twenty feet, but the width varied greatly; sometimes six feet, then it would extend to nearly fifty, here a rock would jut out in a most fantastic form, resembling a wild human figure, or perhaps some non-descript monster, while on the other side would be seen castles and cottages, carved out in nature's most gleesome mood. We continued our journey, novelties of this nature amusing us, without meeting any hindrance, save a few fissures of trifling width and depth, for about five miles. Suddenly Professor Simmons, who was in advance, gave a loud exclamation and instantly fell back, knocking over Dr. Rowan, who in his turn overthrew the rear, until most of us lay sprawling, wholly ignorant of the cause. But it was soon perceived,—one step more and the Professor would have precipitated himself into a chasm of unknown depth, followed, probably, by Dr. Rowan and myself, and thus would have ended the whole adventure in darkness and death—our fate unknown, for I doubt if the negroes would have had courage and sense sufficient to have found their way back. On examining the chasm we found it extended across the whole passage, and was full ten feet wide, in casting down a stone, after a lapse of something like twenty seconds we could hear it fall into water. In holding our torches down we discovered projecting from the wall at one end, about twenty feet below, a ledge of rocks with a narrow entrance into the wall. Jim consented to be lowered down for the consideration of an extra glass of peach-brandy. Accordingly, we fastened a rope to his body and lowered him down together with a torch, when he soon disappeared through the opening in the wall. We waited with some anxiety for his return, and when half an hour had passed away we felt considerably alarmed,—soon his light was seen flashing through the entrance, and he appeared on the platform, with eyes dilated, bearing in his hand some beautiful specimens of chrystalized spar. On raising him up he related that he had followed the passage abont a quarter of a mile when it opened into a grotto, larger than the great hall at the entrance, formed of the whitest marble, covered with the richest gems,—that when his torch flashed upon the walls they seemed covered with stars. His admiration (expressed in his negro manner) was unbounded, It being

now about 6, P. M., we concluded to have our supper, and being somewhat tired, take our rest till four next morning, when we would make a grand examination of this wonderful grotto. Supper was soon concluded, the watch hours divided, our blankets spread, and a large fire kindled from a species of mould, that lay in heaps around, strongly impregnated with saltpetre. We calculated that we were about 30 miles from the entrance. Temperature by thermometer 60 degrees. Such was the first day's result.

Sunday, Nov. 18, [second day.] Roused at 4, made a hearty breakfast, and had the honor to be first lowered to the entrace of the new cavern, followed by Rowan, Simmons and Jim. The rock appeared to be of a light granite, formation entirely different from the limestone above, after following the passage for near quarter of a mile, all the while upon a descent, we opened suddenly upon the most splendid light that my eyes ever beheld. Imagine a circular marble hall, of great circumference, with an arched ceiling, full two hundred feet above you, from which extended stalachtites and chrystal formations of every shape, some resembling vast chandeliers, others decorating the walls, seemingly festooned with diamonds, on which as our torches flashed, myriads of sparkles dazzled the eye with their gleams. We stood in silence contemplating this wonderful creation of the Almighty, now probably beheld for the first time by man.—After recovering from our surprise, we proceeded to examine the wonders of the scene more minutely. There was no passage leading into the hall, except the one by which we entered. Near the centre was a slight elevation of chrystalized granite pebbles with a rude seat, which we named the pulpit. Dr. Rowan proposed, as it was Sunday, that a chapter be read from a pocket Bible which he had with him, he then took his stand at the pulpit, and read the two first chapters of Genesis to three as admiring hearers as ever graced the inside of a church "built with hands." Deep in the bowels of the earth, we listened to the word of God, catching every sentence that fell, clear and distinct from the lips of the speaker, never before did the history of the creation sound so sublime in the ears of mortal listeners as at that moment. In a spacious temple made by God himself, far removed from the noise and tumult of life, we could not fail but realize the sublime conception of the creation, when "the earth was without form and void, and

darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." There was a slight echo which added rather than injured the effect, but I cannot describe our feelings, to use the expressive words of Professor Simmons, "he felt as if he was in the ante-chamber leading to the presence of his God." We gave it the name of the "Church Grotto." After an absence of nearly two hours, returned to the upper passage and found our negroes had succeeded in throwing our rope bridge across the chasm which we safely crossed and pursued our journey. — We noticed that the further we advanced along the passage it became more damp, which we imagined must proceed from some subteraneous lake or collection of water. I forgot to mention that the thermometer in the cavern was at 62 degrees, while in the upper passage it was 60. During the rest of the day nothing of importance happened, our passage way grew rather wider and we met with no obstruction whatever, we were rather surprised that we had met with no passages leading from the main entrance. At 6, P. M., halted, and took supper; by means of our lamps we made a kettle of hot coffee, which was quite refreshing. Set our watch, and prepared for sleep.

This day travelled about forty miles. Thermometer at 60. Course by compass S. E.

Monday, Nov. 19, [third day.] Up at 4, breakfasted and continued our journey, some of the party complained of weak eyes, which considering we had seen nothing but lamp light for nearly three days was not surprising. About a mile from our sleeping place we came to a small chamber from which led two passages; both of about the same size, from one of them came a faint noise, like distant thunder, which we fancied might be wind sweeping through some farther outlet, this inclined us to follow that passage, after advancing for about half a mile the sound increased, accompanied by dampness, and we were now certain that the noise proceeded from the fall of a heavy body of water, after advancing some three miles it increased to the loudest thunder; the dampness nearly extinguished our lights, the sound now became so terrible that we could not hear each other's voices unless close together, on turning abruptly, we came upon a platform extending about a hundred feet, which then suddenly broke off into an abyss, down which from the opposite side, extending across the whole passage, descended a

vast sheet of water from a height of more than a hundred feet, how far it fell into the abyss below we could not ascertain, the rock being slippery we dared not venture to the edge. Above us was a slight spray which as our lights flashed upwards gave it a slight tinge, resembling the faint outlines of a rainbow, the sight was magnificent. The width of the fall was less than a hundred feet, and formed a complete barrier to our farther progress in this direction. We were now convinced that the cave must have an outlet in the direction of the other passage in the small chamber, as this vast body of water evidently pursued the same direction. After taking a farewell view of the cataract, to which we gave the name of "Mammoth Falls," we retraced our steps, and arrived at the chamber from which we started about 12 o'clock; (I should have written noon had we been *outside* of the earth.) Here we took dinner, and entered the new passage, which we found to be much wider than the other, the rock also was of a different formation, being a speices of gneiss, our pathway was now more obstructed than at any time previous, in some places the fragments that had fallen from the roof nearly choked up the passage, so that it cost great labor in clambering over the ruins, the top of the passage was also covered with fissures, and the whole appearance denoted that it had been opened by an earthquake. We proceeded but slowly on our way, and at 6 o'clock, had not advanced the distance we wished; so we concluded to keep on until 8, about that hour we discovered a spring of boiling water, directly in our path which issued from a fissure in the rock, bubbling and foaming as if in a kettle. It had a pleasant taste, and we soon put a portion of it to good use by making a pot of coffee, that was truly delicious, we also boiled one of our pieces of bacon, and we lacked nothing but a few vegetables to have made our supper fit for an epicure. Made the usual preparations, and prepared for sleep.

This day travelled about twenty-eight miles. Average of thermometer 60. Course E. S. E.

Tuesday, [fourth day.] We were roused early this morning by a terrible noise that sounded like thunder, all started up, groping about and shouting to each other, for the lights were extinguished, and indeed considering the situation we were in, there was no wonder at the display of trepidation, manifested on all sides. One of the negroes soon struck a

light, and we discovered that Jim (whose watch it was), was missing, this alarmed us and we immediately commenced the search. Proceeding a little distance along the passage we came to a small apartment, and there we discovered Jim extended on the floor, with a discharged rifle by his side,and he perfectly insensible. We had him carried back to our encampment, and after rubbing him sometime and pouring a little brandy down his throat, he seemed sufficiently recovered to tell us the cause of the disturbance. While trimming his torch, he stated a big black monster, "black as de debbil," with wings, flew at him, knocked him down, and then flew back. Catching up a rifle he run after the nondescript, which kept flying from him, until as he thought he had him within shooting distance, when he fired, and in an instant a whole legion of "debbils" rushed at him, fluttering their wings in his face, and he recollected nothing more until he found us rubbing him. I instantly suspected that a bat, attracted by the light, had flown through the passage, and was gratified in the belief, as I knew that these animals must have an entrance other than through the way by which we came. We took breakfast and then followed the passage leading to the scene of Jim's adventure, to the great fear of the negroes, who no doubt expected to meet the "devil" to a certainty. On entering the chamber, we found an enormous bat lying dead, that measured over five feet from wing to wing, and body in proportion. It was indeed a monster—Jim felt like a hero,—the negroes recovered from their fright and gave him the name of "Jim Bat," which he bore during the rest of our journey. We passed on, expecting to meet more of the tribe, but they had evidently been as much frightened as Jim himself, and taken themselves out of the passage. Pursuing our journey, till dinner time, without meeting with any thing extraordinary, we stopped to lunch, and on placing my pocket compass on the stone floor, the needle commenced oscillating rapidly, we could not account for this singular variation, because on removing the compass a few yards further, it instantly ceased its motion, and pointed apparently correct, but whenever placed within a certain space the oscillation was renewed violently. The rock within this space was a kind of porphyritic stone mixed with granite and a species of ore resembling iron, and the whole had evidently been acted upon by fire as it presented that moltern appearance peculiar to metalic substances, cooled in a half dissolved state. After dinner we discovered that one

of the tin cans containing oil had leaked several gallons, and on making a calculation of our future consumption, found that with great economy we had not more than sufficient to last us five days longer. We held a council, and came to the conclusion that if no outlet was discovered by next day noon, however reluctant we might be to return, we should be compelled to do so; we therefore, resolved to make the best use of our time and rest very little at night.

Pursued our journey at 1 o'clock, and after travelling a few miles, found that our thermometer had risen two degrees, which cheered us, as we found that this betokened a connection with external atmosphere in the direction we were journeying. Our path was unobstructed so that we advanced with more rapidity than at any time previous, the archway above us was filled with numerous fissures, and it seemed as if at some former period internal fire had cracked and split open the whole passage. A species of moss also grew upon some portions of the rock, some of it quite fresh. But that which gave us more delight than even the splendid sights we had already met with, was a little solitary flower picked by Dr. Rowan, from where it grew in the cleft of a rock, far removed from the light of day, the sight of man, or as far as we could discover the haunt of any living thing around. It was of a light slate color, and resembled a wild rose, though it was destitute of perfume. At a little distance farther on, we met at the side of the passage a spring of water, which crossed our path and was lost in a cleft of the rock. It was very pleasant to the taste, and we rested to try its qualities with some of our peach brandy, drinking to the "Flower that first cheered us on our solitary journey."—We were soon again upon our march, and met with nothing particular, except that we passed through numerous chambers, from some of which led small passages; we found plenty of moss in a state of vegetation, giving us renewed hope of soon meeting an outlet. In this way we continued our route till 3, A. M., when we stopped to rest until 6 o'clock.

This day we had journey near sixty miles, being a much greater distance than any previous time. Thermometer 62. Course due east. We took our coffee and supper confident that next day at the same hour we should be out of the cave. Retired to rest, but my mind was so occupied with imagination of new scenes and discoveries, that I slept but little,

and I presume the rest of my companions were similarly situated.

Wednesday, [fifth day.] All up at 6 o'clock, and after a hearty breakfast commenced our journey; we had not proceeded more than ten miles before we came to a spacious hall in one part of which we found numerous bones of some enormous animal, together with tusks, resembling those of the mammoth in the museum at Philadelphia, after an investigation of the probable size of the monster to which they belonged, Professor Simmons stated that it must have stood at least twice the heighth of the largest elephant, the bones were very numerous, and from the height of the entrance, the animals when living never could have entered. It was evident therefore that they had been placed here by the hands of man. Continuing on, we found along the passage scattered bones of smaller size, and in some places they were regularly piled up, not a great distance further, one of the negroes struck something with his foot which sounded like metal, and on picking it up we found it be the iron head of a spear, very much corroded, shaped like those of the ancient Romans. We needed no further proof to show that the end of our journey was near. We also found pieces of wood, fashioned by some instrument, showing the hand work of man, at length a faint glimmering of light was seen in the distance we hastened rapidly onward, and on turning a sharp angle, we entered a vast hall opening directly to the light of day! Oh! what a shout burst from us all at that moment, onward we rushed—the goal was won! Our eyesight at first dazzled after our long absence from day, gradually returned, and we stood looking down upon a vast plain that lay a mile or two below us covered with verdure, beautiful pastures and trees, the fields spread with rich flowers, and in the distance a range of high mountains, extending up into the clouds! But the sky—such a light, so beauful—so clear, and of all the tints of the rainbow. To the north appeared one glow of living light dazzling to behold, gilding the whole scene with surpassing richness, until it faded away in the extreme south. Indeed the whole view partook more of the fairy scenes described in the Arabian Nights, than reality,—we were in the interior of the earth, and SYMMES' theory of an opening at both poles was now fully proved. Indeed, the general appearance of the atmosphere was so different from that of the world we had left, that

a glance showed the correctness of SYMMES' theory. The light appeared to enter wholly from the north, for to the south, (as I before stated) it gradually melted away into indistinctness. As the sun, outside of the earth, was now in its winter solstice, of course it was advancing northerly, which accounted for the light coming wholly from that direction. This made the day perpetual until the sun nearly reached the equinoctial line, when the light grew less until it passed far south, where as it would shed its light through the southern orifice, that portion of the new world would then receive its day, while the northern portion would be comparatively dark. We returned back into the cavern to divest ourselves of those articles which we should not immediately need, previous to our venturing down into the plains. Here new wonders struck us, in one corner of the cavern stood sculptured out of a single piece of rock, a gigantic human figure, coarsely executed, but showing correct knowledge of proportion. The head was covered with a high conical cap, from which the hair flowed down over the breast, nearly encircling the arms which were crossed, the head resting on the shoulders. The lower part of the figure was covered with a species of mantle, the position of the drapery was well carved, showing the outlines of the legs, the whole in a sitting posture. The features we regarded most; the face was broad, and the cheek bones high, the nose also, broad, with a peculiar flatness across the mouth and chin, so striking in the physiognomy of the Tartars. The walls around were also carved with rude sculpture in relief, of various figures and shapes, one of which struck us as relating to the astronomy of the natives. It was a circle evidently intended to represent the sun from which the rays were streaming down upon a long oval shaped globe, nearly in a direct line below it. Across the globe were drawn three lines, dividing it into as many equal sections. There was a rude hieroglyphic inscription beneath of some length. There were also figures of several unknown animals, one of which much resembled a horse, with a horn growing directly from the forehead. About 4, P. M., after a survey of an hour or more, we prepared for our journey into the new regions, taking with us but a few necessary articles, together with our rifles, to defend us both from natives and animals if necessary. A rude path, wound gradually from the entrance of the cavern, to the plains below, the sides of the mountain which we were descending were covered with lofty trees of various kinds

and beauty, one of which, a species of pine, grew to an enormous heighth. Birds of splendid plumage, darted around us, the groves were filled with melodies, and almost every instant, animals of various kinds crossed the path, though none of a species larger than the ordinary fox, of which kind some appeared to be. The atmosphere was balmy, and the gentle wind which swept by was filled with the most delicious scent imaginable. It seemed a perfect paradise. At about a mile from the cave we came to a little cascade that came tumbling down from the cliffs and disappeared in a small basin fringed with flowers and water lilies. The water was clear and transparent, beautiful fish were swimming about, turning their golden sides upwards as they glided to and fro, and two or three wild swans disturbed by our approach, rose from the lake, uttering their shrill notes as they winged their way upwards and were soon lost in the distance. We paused for a little while to contemplate the scene. We were still a mile from the level fields which lay stretched out like a many coloured carpet below us, here would be seen a belt of vivid green, there a patch of orange verdure, then, perhaps adjoining, a field of white and gold, like waving yellow grain mixed with many flowers. Herds of animals were calmly grazing, and ever and anon, flocks of birds rose up to add stirring life to the quiet beauty of the picture. With our pocket glasses we scoured the horizon, to see if we could discover ought of man or his habitation, but we perceived nothing that betokened the near existence of any of our race. We pursued our journey, and presently came to a grove of trees bearing a fruit in appearance like our choicest peaches, they were delicious to the taste, and instead of a pit contained a few small seeds. Plum trees also were growing around, with a fruit exactly like our green-gages, and for a few minutes we resembled a parcel of cormorants gorging themselves after a long fast. Our delicious repast over, we journeyed on, and soon reached the bottom of the mountain, and on gazing back could see far above us the entrance to the cavern, looking like a dark speck in the green verdure that surrounded it. Far above, the mountains towered in grand magnificence until their summits were lost in the prismatic sky. We now came to a wide beaten track, evidently made by animals on their way to and from the hills, the soil was of a rich loamy kind, beaten perfectly hard, and the path would have been considered an admirable road in any country. It diverged in several directions across the plains,

and we selected the most prominent one, which led in a northerly direction. Our way was lined with the most luxuriant pasture, bearing grasses and herbage of various kinds, intermixed with flowers of every colour and species, forming the most delightful prospect imaginable. Now and then a clump of trees would be seen rearing themselves above the plains, perfectly free from underbrush, and forming a most beautiful grove. We passed a herd of wild buffaloes who on our near approach started off at full speed and were soon out of sight, their appearance, and indeed, the whole scene, reminded us of one of our rich western prairies. Having travelled some four hours, by our watches, we began to feel hungry, and thought it best to kill some of the game which was plentiful around us; we went off a little distance into the prairies and scattered ourselves so as to surround a flock of one or two hundred animals, resembling the smaller species of deer. They permitted us to approach within rifle distance, when one of our party firing before the signal, they started off with the rapidity of lightning, so that we were obliged to fire mostly at random. Fortunately one was so severely wounded that we captured and despatched it, after a short pursuit. It was one of the antelope species, the head short, with curved horns, a slender neck, the body bulky, and the legs slender and beautifully formed for speed. The back of the skin was brown, tinged by a dark streak, along the sides, and on the belly the hair was perfectly white. It was a male, very fat, and we soon had a portion of his body both in steaks and roasting pieces cooking, in rustic style, over a fire kindled by the road side. The meat was juicy and delicious, and never was meal enjoyed with greater satisfaction, than this, the first of which we had partaken in the new region. Feeling somewhat tired after our meal, (nothing but the bones of the animal were left), we prepared for a brief sleep. As the day was perpetual, our watches were of no use to "take note of time," except to preserve the consecutive hours, to be divided at our leisure into the days of the old world. I had just fallen into a drowsy slumber, half way between sleeping and waking, one of those most delightful feelings of conscious unconsciousness, if the expression may be used, when I was aroused by the loud shouts of the negroes, and sprang at once from my couch. They were gazing and pointing, with delight, upwards, and when my eyes followed the same direction I was not less astonished and delighted then they were. In the heavens

to the north was to be seen rapidly approaching us some twenty or thirty birds of the most enormous size, and on the back of each appeared to be seated a human being, we could hear the wild scream of the monsters, intermingled with the sound of human voices, so clear and calm was the atmosphere. They came rapidly onwards, and in a few moments were so near that we could perceive the outlines of the human figures, perched upon the backs of these feathered giants. Their riders did not appear to perceive us until we raised a shout, when they suddenly clustered in the air, and appeared to hold a brief consultation together, suddenly they wheeled directly over our heads, and then descended with a fearful rapidity a little distance from us. Off we started to form an acquaintance with our new visiters, but when we approached within a certain distance, they pulled their feathered coursers by a sort of bridle and they instantly rose above us, keeping just clear of our reach, had we felt disposed or thought it politic, we could easily, with our rifles, have dispatched one of the feathered bipeds, and so have secured its rider. We made every signal of friendship but they appeared suspicious, so we went back to our baggage, thinking it likely, if we took no notice of them, they would be more apt to approach us. We seated ourselves leisurly, commenced smoking our segars, chatted a little, and busied ourselves in various ways apparently not paying the least attention to our suspicious neighbours, this had the desired effect, after a little chattering, several of them dismounted and came very near us, so that we had a good examination of their persons. They were small in stature, the tallest among them not exceeding five feet seven, their skin clear and fair as the whitest of our own country, their hair light and falling to the waist, eyes blue; and no beard, with a cast of features resembling the face of the statue in the cave, though not so heavy. Going up to one of them, less timid than the rest, I held out my right hand towards him, extending in my left at the same time a biscuit. Within two or three feet of me he bent his head slightly, and crossed his arms, placing his hands upon his shoulders, judging this to be their mode of salutation, I went through the same proceedings, which seemed to please the stranger, for he took the biscuit which I offered, and after looking at it, bit off a small piece, and handed the remainder to his fellows, exclaiming at the same time "Lu! Lu!" which was repeated by the others. Intercourse now being commenced, their shyness was thrown aside, and they all dismounted, leaving their "flying

coursers" in charge of one of their number, and were soon as familiar as could be expected. They were full of good nature and curiosity, perfectly friendly and harmless, and at the occasional remarks of one of their number, who appeared to be a great wit among them, they would burst into loud fits of laughter. But the negroes attracted their greatest notice; they would examine them attentively, rub their skins hard, as if they expected to find the black color of their faces was merely a species of paint. The negroes bore it with perfect good humor, and would join in the laugh as heartily as their examiners; in fact, it seemed a race between them which should outdo each other in joviality. Nothing was omitted in their scrutiny; our clothes, baggage, rifles, all was examined. Dr. Rowan they seemed to regard as the chief man amongst us, and to him they were very deferential in their conduct. Indeed it was not surprising, being tall and well proportioned, standing six feet two, they regarded him as a being of no ordinary consideration. After having satisfied their curiosity, as to ourselves, they by their motions endeavored to ascertain where we came from, and how, pointing south, as if from that direction, and to the sky as though like themselves we were transported on the backs of birds. We pointed up to the hills and described as near as we could the cavern, at the same time by our motions describing our country as different from theirs. Professor Simmons, with a pointed stick, sketched on the ground a hill, with a small circle in the centre, and then described our course from the hill. They seemed to comprehend our meaning, with evident delight, pointing towards the cave, exclaiming at the same time "Her-me-ter!" Her-me-ter!" I should have mentioned before that the tones of their voices were peculiarly soft and musical, which together with their frank open manners, made them pleasant and agreeable companions. At length they made motions for us to accompany them to their ostriches, (for we gave their coursers that title,) on proceeding to their halting place, we found these enormous creatures feasting on the carcass of a buffalo, that they themselves had pursued and killed.* They were under perfect subjection, and at a word from their masters, left their meal, and came towards us, bending themselves as much as possible, as if expecting us to mount. They resembled as near as we could imagine the Ostrich, though twice the size of that of Africa. A large pouch formed of hide,

* The Condors of South America will single a wild ox out of a herd, and pursue him until they despatch and devour him.

fastened by a wide belt around the neck, and strapped loosely round the base of the wings, so as not to impede their flight, formed the saddle,—a thong of hide fastened at the head of the bill constituted the bridle, and in this simple manner were these feathered creatures rendered subservient to man. Our guests motioned us to mount, at the same time pointing in the direction from whence they came; but we declined, particularly as it was not very pleasant, riding two on horseback, setting aside a double flight on the back of an ostrich. They seemed to comprehend our reasons for declining, and presently two of their number mounted and flew off with great rapidity, and were soon out of sight.

After an absence of near two hours, we saw them like specks on the horizon, returning, and as they approached, we discovered they were accompanied by eight or ten others, together with nearly twenty "Om-mos" (as they called their coursers) without riders. They soon reached us, and we now underwent an examination from the new comers, whom from their appearance we judged to be soldiers. Instead of the loose fitting coarse linen gown, reaching to the knees, worn by the others, they were clad in a tight fitting jacket of undressed deer skin, studded with a profusion of glittering ornaments. Beneath this, from the waist nearly to the knees, fell a shirt of blue cloth, in thick folds; the knees were bare. Boots of rough dressed hide, and a cap formed of materials like the jacket completed the dress. They were armed with iron headed spears, about eight feet long, and each had stuck in their belts a small curved knife, similar to the Turkish cimetar. Their commander was the tallest man among them, being about five feet eight. He appeared to be a person of great importance to his followers, though to us he was very civil and deferential. We were soon informed by signs that the spare "Om-mos" were for our accommodation, and after a brief consultation among ourselves we concluded it best to follow out the adventure. Dr. Rowan was the first to mount his "Om-mo," which he did by getting into the hide pouch or case on its back, leaving him exposed only from the waist upward, like an Indian's pappoose, with his arms at liberty to support himself by the thongs round the bone of the wings. We all soon followed his example, our baggage was safely secured, and on the signal being given from our military leader, up we rose. My first emotions were pleasant, yet terrible. I dared not turn my eyes downward; for the sight however magnificent, would be overpowering. By degrees I felt that I might bring myself

to overcome my emotions, and contemplate the glorious scene below. Up we went, soaring higher and higher into the rainbow sky, until having reached the desired elevation, our "Om-mos" formed themselves into regular lines, so well trained were they, and flew as near as possible on a direct level towards the north. I now ventured to take my eyes from the heavens and look around. My companions were all about me, for it appears we were placed in the centre, surrounded by the natives, whether to prevent us from escaping, or for fear that our "Om-mos" might make way with their new riders, I could not tell. By degrees I cast my eyes downward, and oh! the splendour of the sight that met my gaze. Far below me like a delicate traced map, lay fields, meadows and hills in their clear primitive colours, mingled, yet distinct, and the beautiful atmosphere shedding its variegated light, over the whole formed a scene which can be imagined, not described! Here run a stream liquid and distinct as a river of molten gold,—meandering in the distance; the effect of a different light sheeted it with silver, and then perhaps in the extreme range of the eye, it lost itself in a ribbon of delicate blue. The fields were dotted with animals, roaming from spot to spot,—flights of birds far beneath us sent up their sweet strains, mingling deliciously with the noble grandeur of the sight, until the senses were blended so harmoniously together, one could imagine himself only in the paradise of the final hereafter! Such were my feelings —my thoughts were lost in the contemplation. At length, the habitations of man began to show themselves. As we approached nearer and nearer the earth, dwellings of different shapes began to multiply; in some places, tall spires, in others, humble huts clustering together, showed where man congregated with his fellow man. Now and then a group of the inhabitants could be seen gazing at us as we passed along with apparent unconcern, or perhaps a solitary pedestrian would look at us for an instant and then pursue his journey without further notice. We had by this time been nearly an hour on our journey, and I thought from the frequent consultation between one of the rear riders, who seemed to be a kind of adjutant, and the commander, that we must be near the end of our flight. Nor was I wrong in my supposition; in a short time the dwellings became more compact and we began to descend, and soon after alighted in the square of a village containing some five or six hundred houses. A crowd of several hundred persons of both sexes and of all ages greeted our arrival, regarding us with the

utmost astonishment. We were conducted to the dwelling of the officer who headed us, a fine building of whitish stone, several stories high. We entered through a door of ordinary dimensions into an apartment which covered the whole ground; the sides and ceiling were formed of boards, painted with a variety of colors; chairs of rude construction were ranged along the sides, and in the centre was a wide table, covered with provisions just placed there. Signals were made for us to fall too, when all left the room, with the exception of our leader, and several inferiors who acted as servants. There was flesh of various kinds, boiled, roasted and stewed; each served up in a large bowl formed of the most transparent porcelain, which were handed round in succession to all of us. Before every man was placed a small bowl into which he placed a little of the several kinds handed him, and then mixing the whole together, at it they went. A kind of spoon formed of platina, was all the implement used in eating, except the curved knife before mentioned, which was drawn from the belt and served to carve with, when necessary. The meat was cooked to rags, but with our appetites we had no fault to find with our food. At a signal given, the attendants removed the bowls, and placed upon the table large quantities of the most delicious fruits and melons imaginable. After we had feasted ourselves sufficiently, they were also taken away, and three or four long necked pitchers of solid gold were introduced and passed round, containing a fermented liquor resembling beer, but of a sweeter taste and weaker. Our repast being concluded, we were informed by signals that this was to be our stopping place, and the rooms above our resting apartments. The upper stories were reached by ladders through an opening in each floor, where we found some twenty or thirty thick mats stuffed with a soft substance and covered with most beautifully embroidered silken cloth. After an examination of our quarters we sallied out, accompanied by a guide, leaving the negroes to follow their own inclinations. The streets of this pretty little town crossed each other at right angles, being laid out in regular squares,—the houses were mostly of two stories, formed of stone; the windows were covered merely with transparent cloth, rolled up at pleasure, nor did we observe any thing like glass during our stay.

The inhabitants were very civil and orderly, never incommoding us in the least, to gratify their curiosity, however much they were astonished by our appearance. We went into several shops where we found the men engaged at work;

some as tailors, who by the by plied their needles (formed of gold, similar to our own) with great dexterity and neatness. The cutlers completed their work to great perfection; indeed the steel blades of several kinds of knives which we examined, were superior to any thing of the kind we ever saw. We also visited the shops of the various mechanical branches, the manufacture of which would have done honor to any country on the globe. Why I am so particular in my description is, that "Tan-tu" (this town) we afterwards ascertained, was one of the principal places in the nation, for some kinds of manufactures, particularly cutlery. We met many females in our progress, most of whom were very pretty, with red cheeks, fine teeth, and smiling faces. Indeed, the characteristic trait of these people appeared to be merriment. On our return to our quarters we found the negroes gratifying a large concourse of spectators in dancing "Juba;" from the shouts of the auditory we thought they were highly amused. When we arrived at our lodgings we found the commandant anxiously waiting for us, and from his signals wishing us to follow him, which we did. On a plain just out of the the town we found drawn up in military array, about five hundred men on foot; some armed with spears, and others with steel bows ready to go through their evolutions. At the word of command, they separated into two opposing battalions and went through a sham fight in excellent style. After this a target was set up, and the bowmen were very expert, hitting the centre almost every time at a distance of fifty yards. Dr. Rowan, one of the most expert rifle shots in Kentucky, now thought he would show them a trial of his skill with his favorite weapon. Observing a large bird floating lazily at a good distance overhead, he called their attention to the object, and raising his rifle with steady aim, pulled trigger and their astonishment was unbounded at seeing the flash, and hearing the report, followed by the fall of a large eagle in the agonies of death. They thronged round him with anxious delight, regarding him as a supreme being, and examined the rifle with the most prying curiosity. We were soon after conducted to our quarters, and after a meal similar to our last, we retired to rest, fatigued and delighted with our late adventure.

After a refreshing slumber of six or eight hours, we were aroused by the sound of wild music, something like the discordant notes of a bag pipe immediately in front of our residence. On raising the transparent screen or window, we observed a procession of two or three hundred persons

in files, five or six abreast, slowly passing along with a degree of solemnity fitted to some mournful occasion. The leaders were very old men, some of them tottering along scarcely able to walk and supported by their aged companions who might not be so feeble. Next followed others not so old, and so the ages continued to the end of the procession in regular succession, ending with boys of not more than six years of age

We conjectured that it had something to do with the obsequies of the dead, and concluded to follow the procession and witness its termination. Accordingly we sallied out and quietly followed the train at some distance behind. The music though discordant, was wild and solitary,—it seemed a sort of plaintive wail, accompanied by a rude chant from the younger parties of the mourners,—rude as it was it sounded very impressive. At length the procession stopped in front of a house, the door-way of which was covered with white cloth, and from the windows hung festoons of a similar material. From the roof was suspended a rude drawing on green silk that came down nearly to the first story, it represented a tree destitute of leaves the branches shattered, and the trunk old and bare, it was uprooted and appeared as if just falling. A number of small trees were springing up around, seemingly sprouts from the old trunk. Not a being appeared from, or about the house, and all bore a solitary appearance. At length a very old man stepped from the procession, and commenced a tremulous harangue which was listened to with great attention. At the conclusion of his discourse which lasted perhaps ten minutes, there was a burst of music, when the door suddenly opened and four men appeared carrying a bier, on which lay a body covered with a white mantle. All this time the mournful music was sending forth its notes, and the bearers of the body passed slowly on taking their station at the head of the procession, which now resumed its way. We noticed that whenever it encountered a passer-by, the individual, if a male, uncovered himself until the corpse passed,—the females bent their bodies and remained silent with their eyes cast on the ground. Indeed to us, there was such a general and true expression of grief, that we felt a warm yearning to a people who could thus beautifully tender the last tribute of affection towards one of their number now gone for ever. After passing through the main street of the village, the procession went out into the fields through a path, the borders of which were decked with

flowers and fruit trees, forming a beautiful arbour nearly a mile in length, when it opened upon an extensive space of ground, perfectly level, and gravelled. In the centre of the plot was erected a pile of light wood about six feet high, and perfectly square,—on the top was laid a couch of some soft substance prepared for the body, which was taken by the bearers from the bier and placed in its position on the centre of the pile, covered as before with a white cloth. A chant was now commenced, by the assembly, when some eight or ten of the number advanced and threw on the corpse bunches of flowers, until it was nearly covered with them. Then others advanced with bundles of odoriferous woods, and spices which were placed upon the pile, and the body completely hid from view. The old man that I have before spoken of, now came forward, and bending towards the north, made a slight reverence, and then turning towards the corpse, appeared as if communing with the dead. Slowly rising from his bent posture the aged man motioned to one of the youngest of the children, who came forward and handed the patriarch a lighted torch which with his trembling hands he applied to the pile, and in an instant the funeral pyre was blazing towards heaven. The scene was a philosophic picture of the close of life, and the veriest stranger could not fail to draw a lesson from the conclusion. The deceased was a venerable man, and a brother in years, performed the "last sad office" to his remains—beside him stood a boy

"In youth's green spring,"—

the early bud just opening into blossom, as the dead had once been, showing that spring and autumn preceded the last winter of existence, which now had finally terminated.

I forgot that I was in a different country from my own,—for in the grave all distinction of country ceases, and I thought only of the dead as a brother,—involuntarily these beautiful lines in the "Thanatopsis" of Bryant rose in my imagination.

"So live,—
That when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that leads
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,—
Thou goest not like the quarry slave at night—
Scourged to thy dungeon,—but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust,—approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
Around him,—and lies down to pleasant dreams."

We did not stop to see the conclusion of the ceremony, or what was done with the ashes of the dead; they were however undoubtedly collected, and deposited in the earth.

Taking a different path which led out from the place of the funeral, we found ourselves on the borders of a lake which extended to a great distance. The waters were very transparent, and at the depth of fifty feet we could see the fish swimming along the bottom very distinctly. Sauntering along the margin we came to a group of some dozen men, fishermen,—who were preparing to take their prey. We watched them with a great deal of curiosity, as we observed no nets, or fishing lines, and were anxious to discover by what method they caught their supply of fish. They received us with great kindness, occasionally scrutinizing us with attention.—for the news of our arrival had spread all over the country—but with no ill mannered or ill timed curiosity. At length one of the number went up to a hut a little distance off, and brought out several animals, resembling our otters, but considerably larger. They appeared to be very tame, fondling around their masters with all the playfulness of dogs, and eager for their duty. They were now taken along the bank and spread at equal distances apart; when one of the fishermen clapped his hands and gave a shrill whistle as a signal. Instantly they were let loose, and dashed into the water where they quickly disappeared. Scarcely a minute had elapsed before one of the otters reappeared, bearing a fish in his mouth, weighing, I thought, fifteen pounds. Depositing his burden upon the bank, he rushed again into the water. He was successively followed by the others; and in this manner in the space of half an hour, they had caught more than a hundred fish of different kinds, the smallest of which must have weighed at least ten pounds. The fishermen now recalled their industrious and useful "domestics," and graciously permitted them to regale on such of the fish as they saw fit to bestow upon them. The fish were mostly of the pike species, though there were some salmon trout, and one a kind of eel that had as many colors as a dolphin. While viewing this new method of fish taking, some of our guards came running and shouting towards us, and when we were discovered, evinced great delight. From their manner we supposed they were fearful that we might meet with some accident. We accompanied them back to the town, without meeting any thing further worthy of note.

I will not enumerate our actions for the succeeding forty eight hours; they were varied and curious, as you may imagine,—but our visit to the great city of "Ku-ku," the residence of the king, and the mighty wonders seen there, must be reserved for a future letter, which I shall transmit you in a few days.

In the mean time I remain, dear Sir, your most obedient servant,

MONTGOMERY E. LETCHER.

Just as this letter was ready to be put in press, the publisher received the second letter, from the gentleman to whom it is addressed, and it will be immediately published. Its contents are highly interesting and extraordinary.

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